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Humanism and Naturalism in Dan Brown's 'The Da Vinci Code'

Abstract: This Paper outlines the author's Humanistic and Naturalistic approach with his scornful remarks on Christianity and his belief in the fact that there is an alternate history of Christianity and Jesus which the Church has suppressed, kept hidden and sought to destroy for nearly two thousand years and has deliberately been concealed from the people lest should it shake the faith in the religion that could change the entire world's belief system in any religion and the eternal deity. The paper highlights on the author's urge to his readers for the radical and logical understanding and acceptance of the universe, nature and facts than blindly succumbing to any socially or historically accepted divine or supernatural event which could certainly lead to great upheavals in the society. The crux of the papers lies in signifying the author's plea to his readers for their own individual explorations of the unknown truths and unanswered questions balancing on the divine tangent than any blind acceptance of any traditionally followed religious system.

Key Words: Christianity, Humanism, Naturalism, Subjectivity of History.

1.0 Introduction: Dan Brown, the author of 'The Da Vinci Code', certainly requires no introduction; at least to the vivid reading portion of the world. The author has set on his journey to explore and reveal the secret that has been whispered for many centuries. He has challenged the Bible's New Testament claiming it of having certain incongruities regarding Christianity and the birth of Jesus. His plot always draws strength from public knowledge of the past and the present Church scandals which makes it a great recommendation for reading. Ruthless following of any religion, let alone Christianity, results in great disorder and chaos where logic is rendered meaningless and seeking of truth is abstracted to some unknown entities and supernatural phenomenon.

2.0 Secular Humanism vs. Christianity: The Da Vinci Code by Dan Brown is a roller-coaster ride swaying on the boundaries of moral deceit and compromising of "true" facts and beliefs of the Christian society with a tangential edge of preference over a more visible and understandable humanitarian society.

While in Paris on business, the Harvard Professor, Robert Langdon, receives an urgent call. The guardian of the Louvre Art Museum has been executed. The police are stumped by an encrypted message left by the dead man and the writing smeared with his blood.

Langdon follows the trail that leads him to clues left among the works of Leonardo Da Vinci. Sophie Nevue, a Cryptologist and the granddaughter of Sauniere, unites with Langdon in his quest for the truth. They discover that the dead curator was part of a Secret Society – The Priory of Sion – whose members included Isaac Newton, Victor Hugo, and Leonardo Da Vinci himself.

Beyond the scene, Opus Dei, a Catholic lay organization is also plotting to prevent the discovery of another ancient secret: The Holy Grail, also hidden in the Priory of Sion for centuries. If discovered, would shake the foundations of the Church and the faith it has proclaimed for a millennia.

Countless Christians and especially the Roman Catholic Church are dazed by the book's alleged interpretation or rather a re-interpretation of the historic church and its Bible. Since followers of Christ stake their lives on the Biblical record, 'The Da Vinci Code' touched a nerve when its experts declared that the Church had two thousand years' experience in pressurizing those who threatened to unveil its lies. The author signifies through archaic evidence the possibility of Jesus not being a God-Man as described by the Church. Instead, the novel's 'experts' describe Jesus as a mere man who had a child with Mary Magdalene and gave to her the accountability of leading his disciples after he was gone. The source of these allegations is a collection of ancient Gnostic Gospels found in Nag Hammadi, Egypt, in 1943.

'The Secret Book of James' and 'The Gospel of Thomas' are just two of the documents that reflect the ancient philosophy of Gnosticism.

Gnostics have been sourced by the author as promoting alternate view of Christ and the Church since the early days of the Christian Church. They claimed to know of a 'secret knowledge' that was necessary in order to know the truth about God. On the title page, the author claims: 'All descriptions of Artwork, Architecture, Documents, and Secret Rituals in this novel are accurate'. Since so much of the complex plot and theme-development depends on Brown's claim of legitimate research into real people, times and places, it is easy for the reader to assume that the backbone of this book is based on strong and credible grounds where the 'heroes' of the novel are 'Seekers of Truth' who will lead us to higher ground.

Harvard Professor says:

‘I am a historian. I’m opposed to the destruction of documents, and I would love to see religious scholars holding on to more information to ponder on the exceptional life of Jesus the Christ’.

In *The Da Vinci Code*, Dan Brown implies that the Christian Church lays on the shaky foundation, and that the Church- by which he means the Roman Catholic Church- will actually commit murder to keep certain things surreptitious. He means things which could shake its foundation to the very core- things like Mary Magdalene was Christ’s secret lover. The Book has acclaimed worldwide recognition and interest in the general public with more than 80 million copies being sold till date. The book, which tries to diminish the faith of the most followed religion in the world, is bound to raise questions and controversies. The justification of the claims and facts mentioned in the novel may not be accurate or perhaps even possible as the author claims to be but one thing must be considered predominant and of prime importance: The idea and the doctrine of Humanism which is so subtly and ingeniously stated in the novel. Brown uses descriptions of work of fine art to prove that art can tell stories that history tends to obscure.

Criticisms were directed towards the book’s inaccurate descriptions of European art, history, architecture, and geography. Many of the complaints centered on the book’s speculations and misinterpretations and misrepresentations of core aspects of Christianity and the history of the Catholic Church. One of the claims of the author that Mary Magdalene was of the Tribe of Benjamin is refuted by historians by asserting that there is no mention of this in the Bible. The question of whether the book comprises of historical and religious inaccuracies about Christianity and Jesus becomes irrelevant when the question of Humanity arises. The Bible, the New Testament is about loving God, loving thy Neighbor and loving thyself. The entire focus of the New Testament is Love. Peace, compassion and forgiveness of wrongs done by others are the key elements of Christian teaching. They are the tenets on

which the entire religion marks its significance across the world. However, Christians have struggled with the question of when the use of force is justified (e.g. the Just War Theory of Saint Augustine). Throughout history, certain teachings from the Old Testament, the New Testament and Christian theology have been used to justify the use of force against heretics, sinners and external enemies.

The Author's rather implicit attack on the world's largest religion by depicting and revealing an alternate history of the said religion lies heavily on the crimes committed in the name of Christianity and Christian doctrines and philosophy. There are various incidents of Christian extremist groups which force the people to convert to Christianity through violence (Manmasi National Christian Army (MNCA), a Christian extremist group operating in North East India which forced Hindus to convert to Christianity at gunpoint). Monte Kim Miller formed a group known as the Concerned Christians in Colorado, during the 1980s. Created to combat New Age religious movements and anti-Christian sentiment, it has shifted to more of an apocalyptic Christian movement as the group adopted the less mainstream views of the millennium held by Miller. They believe all Jews should be converted to Christianity. It is a proven fact that violence and other inhuman methods are used by Christianity to satisfy its purposes across the world which clearly contradicts with their own biblical teachings and preachings.

Dan Brown's allegations and his revelations of an alternate history of Jesus are based on the Gnostic Gospels and the teaching of Gnosticism. From the early days of the Christian Church, Gnostics promoted a different view of Christ. They claimed to know of a 'secret knowledge' that was important in order to understand the truth about God. Regarding this second century teaching of Gnosticism, The New Bible Dictionary says:

'From the standpoint of traditional Christianity, Gnostic thinking is quite alien. Its mythological setting of redemption leads to depreciation of the historical events of the life,

death and resurrection of Jesus. It's view of man's relationship to God leads to a denial of the importance of the personal work of the Christ, while in a Gnostic context 'salvation' is not understood in terms of deliverance from sin, but as a form of existential self-realization'.

Although the Gnostic Gospels are second and third century writings, Brown regards them as the 'Lost Books of the Bible' that represent the true picture of Jesus and his works. As such, Secret Knowledge – Goddess Worship – and self-Deification emerged as an 'Alternative Theory' to the historic record of the Bible. The allegations against the author and his source which are denied and considered inaccurate by many scholars through religious references does not alter the evidence of the said religion acting against its own primary principles.

The Novel moves further with Robert Langdon, the Harvard Professor toward the Swiss bank identified on the back of the key. Langdon explains the history of priory of scion and their armed forces, the Knights Templars. He reveals Priory of Scion is a name given to multiple groups, both real and fictitious. It is said to be secret society founded in the 11th century whose main purpose was to preserve and protect the original precepts of Christianity and act as guardian to Jesus and Mary's sacred bloodline. Its leaders or Grand Masters have included the likes of Robert Fludd, Victor Hugo, Sir Isaac Newton and Leonardo Da Vinci himself. The author, through his protagonist Robert Langdon, claims that Catholic Church had been engaged historically, in a war to destroy the dynasty and its protectors, in order to retain authority afforded it through a patriarchal line of Popes, beginning with Simon Peter instead of the legitimate hereditary succession that began with Mary. This myth is claimed as factual in 'The Da Vinci Code'. There is also the mention of the Holy Grail by the author. The Holy Grail is the bones of Mary and the documents that prove that she had been the mother of Jesus' Children. All these 'facts' as the author claims, are adequately mentioned in the novel based on certain historical records. The purpose behind mentioning these claimed facts is lies

behind the violence and anti-humanistic approach of the religion in trying to protect its certain secrets which, if came out, would ultimately destroy the faith on which it stands and prospers. The facts and the sources of the claims may suffer universal belief and the authenticity but the violence and the crusades in the name of religion definitely hinges on the footstool of veracity. Dan Brown believes in deconstructing the sources with relevance to the modern times instead of blindly accepting or following any dogmas as humanity and not divinity, should be centre of all religious scriptures. Belief in Divinity without human compassion rarely seeks any logical universal truth as all the religions in the world base their ideology on salvation from human pain and sufferings.

The secular humanists believe that the entire universe and life are simply an incredible coincidence. They believe that the universe created itself 4.5 billion years ago, and some combination of chemicals combined to make a single-celled life form that mutated over billions of years into the incredible array of life we see today on the earth. Dan Brown follows the path of secular humanism and asserts that humanists like him want to build a more humane society through ethics based on human and other natural values and they reject supernatural views of reality.

The author also lays claims on Christianity for inhuman approach towards feminine gender.

Brown states that:

‘Powerful men in the early Christian Church ‘conned’ the world by propagating lies that devalued the female and tilted the scales in the favor of the masculine.

‘Constantine and his male successors converted the world from matriarchal paganism to Patriarchal Christianity by waging a campaign of propaganda that demonized the Sacred Feminine.

It is public knowledge that followers of the Christ have not always treated women with love and respect that Jesus himself showed to women who followed him. To the extent,

one can clearly assess that the author is right about the Church's historically recorded devaluation of women and it won't be a fallacy to say that the followers of Jesus missed the spirit of their own scriptures and the word of their own leaders.

According to Brown, Jesus wanted Mary Magdalene to restore to the Church the concept of the Sacred Feminine. As such, Brown had Robert Langdon, the Harvard Symbologist to use the book to explain:

‘The Holy Grail represents the Sacred Feminine, and the Goddess which, of course has now been lost, virtually eliminated from the Church. The power of the Female and her ability to produce life was once very sacred, but it posed a threat to the predominantly male Church and so the Sacred Feminine was demonized and called unclean’.

Dan Brown's claims and his theory of alternate history of Christianity can be defaced by sourcing ‘The Bible’ and other highly followed and sought after texts. But the hypocrisy of going against one's own principles of humanity, peace, love and compassion can also never be ignored. The crimes and sins committed in the name of religion are too many to not pay heed to. The religious wars, the crusades, the killing of feminine gender in the name of witch hunting, the lynching of the Jews and many more are the instances of the atrocities committed in the name of religion. These crimes and such inhuman incidents by Christianity are of way more importance and of magnitude than any allegations laid on it by anyone, let alone be it Daniel Brown. The crux of the novel and the reason for such a novel to be penned down can only be the message of not following any religion blindly and accepting its dogmas without thinking and acting rationally on it as ultimately it is humanity that should survive than any religion.

3.0 The Concept of Naturalism: Naturalism is the idea or belief that only natural (as opposed to supernatural or spiritual) laws and forces operate in the world. Believers of naturalism emphasize that the structure and behavior of the natural universe is solely governed by the

natural laws and that the altering universe at every stage is the product of these laws. The things, the phenomenon and the events that are conceived in our minds and that happen with the eye being its sole and imperative bystander are considered as natural. For example, the birth of a child and the process of how fertilization leads to the birth of a child. Dan Brown, the author being a humanitarian and possessing a rational and scientific temperament is not in favor of unnatural or supernatural bearing of an offspring. The Bible claims Jesus being born of a Virgin Mary. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was tied up to Joseph, but was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. The premier question that arises is that if Mary did conceive Jesus then why she is still called a virgin even after giving birth to Jesus. In order to procreate one must undergo the natural process of physical affections that lead to procreation. Procreation through Holy Spirit is against the doctrines of naturalism. Naturalistic occurrences have conclusion evidence and a universal belief. Supernatural birth will be regarded as absurd in the modern times.

In contrast to the Secularist's view that everything was an accident, the Christians believe that God created the universe and all life. They believe in 'microevolution' or adaptation. This is where an animal will undergo slight changes in order to adapt to changing condition, but no new species is formed or developed from the existing ones. The Bible tells us that we are a special creation, formed in God's image. It tells us of creation of Adam from the dust into a living soul. Dan Brown quotes in one of his interviews that according to his belief all those people in the pursuit of creating technology for a better tomorrow will do more to influence the future of human spirituality than will all the religious leaders combined. The bible solely believes in creationism. It believes that universe and life originated 'from specific acts of divine creation', as opposed to the scientific conclusion that they came about through natural processes. The conflict between creationism and naturalism through evolutionary trends and fossil records cannot be just a simple one.

The thing about religion is that it hasn't changed over for more than two thousand years when talking about modern monotheistic religions. It still believes and follows the same fundamental tenets, still look up to the same texts and that is what makes religion so attractive to the people. It is self-assured and it is consistent. Science and evolutionary trends, on the other hand, are changing rapidly over the course of time. So one has got its strength through consistency and another whose strength lies in rapid innovations and figuring out something new every day. The battle is a fascinating one but the author feels that religion at some point overpowers logic and science and naturalism as human mind craves for a certain order and a belief that there is someone, a higher power who controls these things and everything happens for a reason. Religion is a plea for the peace of mind when it fails to conceive order and entropy at the same time. Still the author feels and believes any reproduction or origin on this planet occurs through some logical incursions and natural processes than any supernatural phenomenon, be it the birth of any noble religious divine entity on this planet.

Dan Brown's ideology is clearly manifested through his narrative of *The Da Vinci Code*. The reason that the author, in an innocent battle of belief between naturalism i.e. evolution and creationism, shifts more towards the ideology of evolution is the amount and significance of the progress that science has been able to achieve over the course of decades and the fact that since the mid-19th century evolution by natural selection has been established as an empirical scientific fact. We, as humans, are inclined to belief what we see and we experience rather than what we are taught to believe or taught to follow without raising any questions. There is a huge scope for belief in the evolutionary trends and the natural process of birth that is witnessed and has conclusive evidence right in front of our

naked eyes. Procreation through supernatural or metaphysical powers or entity can be regarded as highly superficial and farfetched in the modern times. There is no conclusive evidence of procreation without any external invasion of reproductive material and hence it becomes very difficult to obey the historically constructed scripts and doctrine to follow upon. On one side there is science, which declares it to be changing constantly with no authoritative patrons of it and on the other side there is religion, which is tenacious through its authoritative ruling lines and has already assumed it has answers to all the questions that can be raised on this holy planet and its origin.

The Novel moves further along. Robert and Sophie arrive at the place of Leigh Teabing, an expert on Holy Grail, the legend of which is significantly connected to the Priory of Scion to seek some answers to the elusive questions raised on the belief, doctrine and stories of Christianity. The discourse amongst Robert, Sophie and Teabing reaches to the 'Last Supper' the famous painting by the sculptor Leonardo Da Vinci. The painting in the novel is used as a certain empirical evidence to reveal the truth that could very well shake the foundations of the Christianity. Teabing begins his explanation of the 'Last Supper' by Da Vince. He urges Robert and Sophie to notice Jesus in the painting and the disciple on his right side who he believes to be Mary Magdalene herself who is very much disguised as the apostle John. He further observes that Jesus and Mary are posed in the painting as mirror images of each other and the space between them makes the shape of a chalice and Leonardo very subtly manifests the chalice.

The veracity of this claim on the relationship between Mary and Jesus can be certainly questioned and so is done by Sophie in the novel. Teabing, trying to answer the raised question refers to the Gospel of Philip and quotes from it which hints Mary as the companion of the savior and Christ loved her more than any of his disciples. Few realize Mary was descended from kings, just as her husband was and the church was supposed to be carried on

by a woman. These are the 'evidences' given by the author in the novel to prove the companionship of Mary to Jesus and also to prove that Mary was pregnant at the time of crucifixion while ultimately circles back to the naturalistic birth phenomenon and not the supernatural birth through the Holy Spirit.

4.0 Conclusion: The author, Daniel Brown, inculcates themes of religion, art, power, manipulation and femininity which sends his readers on the roller-coaster of emotions and their belief in any modern day monotheistic religions. He writes novels with recurring themes of religion, faith and man's quest for the divine. The author has tried to show an alternate history of Christianity through this fictional work which the author claims is based on absolute facts. A humanitarian approach can be seen in the novel as it tries to make a plea to its readers of restraining themselves to follow any religious restrains, dogmas and principles without conscious questioning. Free thinking individuals should be able and should be allowed to question any source. They must possess the free will to follow any religion or not to follow any religion and conduct their free will for the betterment of themselves as well as the society. The crux of the novel and the reason for such a novel to be penned down can only be the message of not following any religion blindly and accepting its dogmas without contemplating on it and acting rationally on it as ultimately, it is humanity that should always survive prior to any religion.

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